

Message Text

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43

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL LYON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0901

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG PRIORITY

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TAGS : PINT, ECON, FR

SUBJECT : DEMONSTRATIONS IN LYON

DESPITE RELATIVELY HEAVY ADVANCE PUBLICITY IN LA VOIX DU LYONNAIS (THE LOCAL INSERT IN L HUMANITE DIMANCHE) THE COMMUNIST-SPONSORED DEMONSTRATION CALLING FOR THE NATIONALIZATION OF TROUBLED RHONE-POULENC (THE CHEMICAL AND TEXTILE GIANT WITH IMPORTANT FACTORIES HERE) HELD IN LYON ON 14 APRIL ATTRACTED FEW PARTICIPANTS AND LITTLE ATTENTION. THERE WERE ABOUT TWO THOUSAND PARTICIPANTS IN A MARCH THROUGH THE LEFT BANK OF THE CITY. THE LEADING PARTICIPANTS WERE MARCEL HOUEL, THE DEPUTY AND MAYOR OF VENISSIEUX (THE MOST COMMUNIST CITY IN THE RHONE-ALPS REGION AND AN INDUSTRIAL SUBURB OF LYON) AND MME MIREILLE BERTRAND, PERMANENT LOCAL COMMUNIST AND A FORMER EMPLOYEE OF RHONE-POULENC. MOST OF THE PARTICIPANTS LOOKED RELATIVELY YOUNG, AND THEIR BANNERS WERE A MELANGE OF THE HOMEMADE AND THE PROFESSIONALLY PREPARED. THE PROGRES ,THE REGION S LARGEST NEWSPAPER, TREATED THE DEMONSTRATION WITH A TWO-PARAGRAPH ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED ON A BACK PAGE.

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THE DEMONSTRATION OCCURRED AT AN AWKWARD MOMENT. THE CITY BUS DRIVERS WERE ON STRIKE. A RESULT WAS A TRAFFIC JAM AT JUST THE MOMENT THE DEMONSTRATION WAS TAKING PLACE. THE SEASON S FIRST THUNDERSTORM ALSO REDUCED ENTHUSIASM FOR TAKING TO THE STREETS .

THE FOLLOWING DAY THERE WAS A MARCH BY STUDENTS PROTESTING UNIVERSITY REFORM. IT ATTRACTED PERHAPS 4,000 PARTICIPANTS AND WELL-DISCIPLINED. BUT, LIKE THE RHONE-POULENC MARCH, IT ALSO ATTRACTED RELATIVELY LITTLE ATTENTION FROM PEOPLE ON THEIR WAY FROM WORK. IT DID RECEIVE MORE ATTENTION FROM THE THE POROGRES WHICH, HOWEVER, GAVE CONSIDERABLY MORE SPACE TO THE DEMONSTRATION IN PARIS.

THE GENERAL CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE OF RHONE-POULENC REMAINS HIGH HERE. THE COMPANY IS ONE OF THE LARGEST LOCAL EMPLOYERS. HOWEVER, THE EXTENSIVE PROGRAM OF PUBLIC WORKS IN LYON (METRO, THV) AND THE BUILDING BOOM HAS CONTRIBUTED TO A LOW LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT, AND THIS MEANS THAT SOCIAL TENSION IS LESS HERE THAN IN OTHER PARTS OF FRANCE. HOWEVER, STUDENT DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PROPOSED UNIVERSITY REFORM REMAINS HIGH. THE STRIKE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS HAS NOW LASTED SEVERAL WEEKS, AND DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THE PROPOSED REFORMS TAKE PPLACE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK. VERSCHUUR.

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